

Inquiry into Residential Care for Older People, Consultation Response

December, 2011



Health and Social Care Committee Inquiry into residential care for older people RC20 – Welsh Refugee Council

Background

1. The Welsh Refugee Council has over twenty-one years experience of working with refugees, asylum seekers and refused asylum seekers. It provides confidential and independent advice services across Wales, advocates for the rights of refugees and asylum seekers, supports capacity building for refugee community organisations, and promotes good community relations. Its vision is to ensure that refugees and asylum seekers are safe, and that they get the support they need to rebuild their lives in Wales.
2. The Welsh Refugee Council's work is guided by the core principle that the right to seek asylum is a fundamental right. This year marks the 60th anniversary of the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, an international standard that has provided the essential protection to save hundreds and thousands of lives since it was established.

Consultation Response

3. The Welsh Refugee Council welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Health and Social Care Committee of the National Assembly for Wales' Consultation on the Inquiry into Residential Care for Older People in Wales.
4. The Welsh Refugee Council has no record of the number of older refugees living in Wales, nor is there data on the number of those in residential care services.¹ We are however, concerned that the process, by which older people would access residential care services in Wales, would pose formidable challenges for older refugees in particular, due to a number of factors. For example, linguistic differences and the inability of some individuals to read, write, speak and or understand English or Welsh - to point of comprehension - which could make it difficult for refugees to access information and / or even understand their rights and entitlements in terms of access to residential care services without an interpreter.

¹ Residential care is not normally provided for asylum seekers unless they have specific needs which require them to be supported under the National Assistance Act 1947

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5. We would therefore like the Health and Social Care Committee of the National Assembly for Wales, to ensure that residential care service providers are able to demonstrate effective practice when working with interpreters to ensure that refugees and other minority groups are not denied access to services and are aware of their rights and eligibility to access care services without discrimination. To achieve this aim, we believe that all professionals engaged in health and social care services should receive awareness raising and / or training on working with interpreters as a core part of their professional training and ongoing continued professional development.

6. As being unable to speak English or Welsh when accessing care services can not only be a frightening and disempowering experience, but may lead to inappropriate care placements, medical misdiagnosis and / or misunderstanding of the help and assistance that is available. It is good practice therefore to offer all individuals in residential care whose first language is not English, the option of using an interpreter, particularly when discussing medical difficulties. Otherwise, individuals may not realize that they can have a professional interpreter and may try to manage without one, creating difficulties in communication.

7. While older refugees represent a small proportion of our service users, their vulnerabilities can be hugely complex due to the combined effects of cultural and physical displacement from their homeland, physical and mental pain, or trauma, stemming from conflict and atrocities, and, or nutritional deficiencies. The identification of their care needs will therefore need gentle and respectful questioning overtime, maybe with the assistance of a cultural broker (someone who can explain cultural practices and assumptions) to ensure that they feel safe and secure in their new environment. It is vital that care plans and standards recognize individuals' dignity particularly those who have survived traumatic incidents and that steps are taken to ensure that individuals who wish to retain contact with their culture are provided with opportunities to do so. However, it is important to note that some individual's experiences may leave them with a complete lack of trust in their community, and that community support or relations should not therefore be assumed to be an industry standard in the delivery of care.

8. The Welsh Refugee Council would like the Health and Social Care Committee of the National Assembly for Wales to recognize and consider the vulnerability of older refugees in Wales, in order to ensure that they are treated with dignity and respect and that they are provided with quality homecare services like any other older persons in Wales without discrimination. Furthermore, we would also like to inform the Health and Social Care Committee that we will be developing our work with Older Refugees in 2012

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and will be working with organisations such as Age Cymru, to build mainstream capacity and awareness of the particular vulnerabilities facing older refugees living in Wales

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